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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ARROYO SIGNS LANDMARK COUNTERTERRORISM
LEGISLATION AMID LEFTIST CRITICISM

REF: A. MANILA 599

[B](#). MANILA 560

[C](#). MANILA 465

[1](#). (U) At a highly publicized ceremony featuring half the Cabinet, Congressional leaders, senior military and police officials, and the diplomatic corps at Malacanang Palace on March 6, President Arroyo signed the final version of the "Human Security Act of 2007," long-awaited counterterrorism legislation that will expand the tools available to the Philippine government to investigate and prosecute acts of terrorism (ref a). To address concerns by leftist activists and opposition politicians that the law could be used against them during elections, the law will initially become effective two months after the May 14 mid-term elections and will then be automatically suspended one month before and two months after every subsequent election. President Arroyo called the legislation a "landmark in the battle against evil waged by all freedom-loving Filipinos and allies in the world" and said that, with its enactment, the Philippines would no longer be a haven for terrorists. The U.S. Embassy's statement congratulated "the Philippine Government and Congress for this positive step forward in countering and preventing terrorism in the Philippines" by providing needed legal tools while "ensuring protection of civil liberties and human rights."

[2](#). (U) President Arroyo publicly promised that the law would not be used to stifle political dissent and assured that "law-abiding Filipinos have nothing to fear . . . for it is a weapon that shall be wielded against bombers and not protesters," but most leftist legislators and organizations disagreed. Opposition Senator "Jamby" Madrigal called the new law "a license to kill" that gives President Arroyo "the powers of a dictator to punish her enemies by branding them terrorists." Leftist party-list Congressman Satur Ocampo called the law a "death knell" to civil liberties and human rights. Party-list Congresswoman Liza Maza called the signing a "virtual declaration" of martial law and an "endorsement of torture." Labor organizer Joel Maglunsod warned that the government would use the law to "stop and suppress all forms of legitimate crusades by the people against anti-people policies." Communist Party of the Philippines spokesman "Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal called the new law "the most fascist legal instrument of the state since the 1972 declaration of martial law and Marcos's open dictatorial rule," which "serves only the US and local fascists' interests." He labeled it "an extremely vicious and evil instrument that will be used by Arroyo to suppress the Filipino people," and urged "all NPA units to carry out tactical offensives nationwide to punish the Arroyo regime and its armed forces."

[3](#). (U) Current President of the influential Catholic

Bishops' Conference of the Philippines Bishop Angel Lagdameo said in an interview on March 7 that, while terrorism must be condemned in the most absolute terms, the right to defend against it must be exercised in the context of "moral and legal norms" and with respect for human rights and the rule of law. In a personal commentary posted on the Conference's website, typically outspoken Archbishop Oscar Cruz praised the removal from the legislation of "much of its sharp and mortal fangs" but said it still "raises many legitimate doubts and questions," particularly with respect to definitions of key terms, such as what constitutes "extraordinary fear and panic."

¶4. (U) The Leyte Regional Trial Court on March 7 issued a warrant of arrest for Congressman Satur Ocampo for a 23-year old murder case stemming from an internal purge of NPA members. Ocampo went into hiding following the arrest order.

In a "secret" interview on March 8, Ocampo called the charges baseless and a gross miscarriage of justice, and said the government is afraid of party list presence in Congress. Communist Party of the Philippines founder Jose Sison and National Democratic Front chief negotiator Luis Jalandoni, both in self-exile in the Netherlands, are also defendants in the case.

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